

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method of treating a crude oil comprising:

a step of separating the crude oil by distillation ~~where the crude oil is separated by distillation in a distilling section~~ into a distillate oil and a heavy oil content, said distillate oil including a vacuum gas oil content, a gas oil content, a kerosene content and a naphtha content;

a step of ~~thermal~~ thermally cracking ~~[[where]] the heavy oil content separated at said step of separating the crude oil by distillation and obtained substantially from [[the]] a bottom is thermally cracked to lighten the content, of the distilling section into a lightened thermally cracked product;~~ and

a step of separating the ~~thermal cracking~~ lightened thermally cracked product by distillation ~~in the distilling section, where the thermal cracking product obtained by lightening at said step of thermal cracking is separated by distillation;~~

wherein said step of separating the crude oil by distillation and said step of separating the ~~thermal cracking~~ lightened thermally cracked product by distillation are carried out at the same time in ~~[[a]] the distilling section comprising~~ including a vacuum distillation apparatus, and said distillate oil is collectively introduced into a hydrotreating section without separating into each content having prescribed boiling range and is collectively subjected to desulfurization, cracking and hydrogenation treatment.

Claim 2 (currently amended): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein the distilling section in which said step of separating the crude oil by distillation and said step of separating the ~~thermal cracking~~ lightened thermally cracked product by

distillation carried out at the same time further comprises a pre-separation apparatus and a main separation apparatus.

Claim 3 (currently amended): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein ~~[[the]]~~ an amount of the heavy oil content separated in said distilling section and withdrawn from the bottom is within a range of 15 to 55 parts by weight relative to 100 parts by weight of ~~[[a]]~~ said distillate oil from the distilling section.

Claim 4 (currently amended): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein the heavy oil content separated in said step of separating a crude oil by distillation, withdrawn from the bottom, and fed to the step of ~~thermal~~ thermally cracking contains substantially neither gas oil content nor vacuum gas oil content.

Claim 5 (currently amended): The method of treating a crude oil according to claim 1, wherein no heavy oil content is contained in thermal cracking residue in said step of ~~thermal~~ thermally cracking.

Claim 6 (canceled)